

Easter term, 1915, first lecture

~~History is a bore to people who do not get in touch with its human aspects.~~ The way to prevent history being a bore is to get in touch with its human aspects. In order to find it really interesting one has to identify it with oneself; and to see human beings of like nature with ourselves trying to cope with difficulties which would be just the same difficulties to ourselves if we were in their places; People solve difficulties and pass on what they have found out and that is one way that the world progresses. And the people who have ~~the advantage of having their difficulties~~ their difficulties provided for generally thoughtlessly assume that they have no one to thank for it. That Providence or Nature or something equally vague put them in possession of knowledge how to do things and that they can go on comfortably doing them without troubling to find out how the difficulties came to be overcome. But as a matter of fact the overcoming of difficulties is the main interest in life. Unlucky people who are spared all the necessity of overcoming difficulties act bored and stupid, and their lives are little use to themselves and ~~not~~ none at all to other people. In order to understand anything a man must have been placed in the position of having to overcome its difficulties.

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If he has not to overcome them himself he may get advantage by putting himself in imagination in the position of the people who ~~learned~~ found out how to overcome them; and renew the processes in his mind. All through the long history of Music successive generations of people have been finding out how to overcome the difficulties which presented themselves to their minds; and if we can realize their difficulties and see how they were vanquished we can understand our Art better that way than any other way. There are of course rotten and unprofitable ways of looking at history. One of the rottenest and stupidest is to think it is made up of names and dates. People who lack the impulse to exercise their minds fall back on mere memorizing. And the easiest things to memorize are names and dates. But you may have a perfect encyclopedia of facts in your mind and continue to understand nothing at all. Dates and names are things useful to check your understanding by, they are of no use till after you have got some understanding. They may enable you to put things in the right order and to prevent your mistaking the cart for the horses,

No better than nonsense syllables.

Absolute continuity

or the man who profited by other people's exertions for the man who did all the work. Dates help you to make sense of distances, and true relations, but if they do not suggest anything in the real work that has been done they are of no use to the man who knows them. They will be no better than nonsense syllables till they have some meaning attached to them. And we get at the meaning best by realizing that there is absolute continuity in the progress of Art from the very earliest and most barbarous efforts made a thousand years ago and the elaborate complexity of our own time. That it was always men of like nature with ourselves who were working away at developing the resources of Art and piling up their discoveries with the same sort of efforts which the small child makes in trying to learn its scales and its chords and the way to finger passages, or the way to use their bow arms or to get into their heads the elementary facts of harmony. Even people who hardly think at all must be aware that Art has constantly got richer and more elaborate. They are mostly aware that it was at first confined to vocal Music, and that ~~music~~-vocal Music of the

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baldest and clumsiest kind. And that men continued to devote their attention to vocal Music for some 400 years. By that time they had found out how to make admirable works of art; works that are as perfect as art can be within the slender limits available in pure Choral Music. Then they began to try their hands at instrumental Music and vocal Music with Accompaniment and Musical drama, and went back to primitive conditions again. For these again they had to build everything up from the beginning – and it took them a long time to develop anything at all satisfactory – but after a hundred years or so that (sic) found out simple principles of form and established the artistic types of Suites and Sonatas and Symphonies and Overtures; and then in turn they got beyond them and Art spread out with the innumerable forms of Opera and Music dramas and Symphonic poems for Orchestras and domestic music and futurist Music, and pantopost futurist Music, and so forth. And all this incredible abundance may be said to have grown up from the single simple melodious

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passages which constituted the plainsong of the early Mediaeval Church, and folk songs which were the only forms of Art they had inherited ~~such things~~ from the earlier ages. It is obvious enough why Music began with vocal Music, because men had ~~hardly any idea to it all; they had to find out how to sound them~~ voices ready to make Music with and instruments had to be made and the way to play them found out; and as long as they were satisfied to explore the possibilities of choral Music they did not want them. They had to begin with simple melodious lines because they knew nothing of harmony. They were as innocent of harmony as ordinary song birds – and they could not write anything down because they knew nothing of staves and notes – and so had to trust to their memories even for the simple melodies they used. The absence of any means of writing Music made it almost impossible to write any kind of counterpoint or free additional parts to a given melody; and this was in fact made quite impossible by their having no system to distinguish relative lengths of notes, or relations of pitch. They knew nothing of semibreves and minims and crotchets and quavers – all that had to be found out,

Organum or Diaphony described in a book called Musica Enchiriadis of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Used to be considered by a Monk called Hucbald. Later investigations refer it Otger or Odo Abbot Bishop of Paris.

The extent to which a discanter was allowed to go was almost unbelievable till you see it recorded.

and so had means to distinguish intervals such as seconds and thirds and fourths and fifths. The result of all this was that the first departure they made from the single line of melody was not the addition of an independent part, but the same ~~mode~~ melody as the other part at a different pitch. They had voices of different calibres, as we have, and it was not convenient for tenors and basses to sing the plainsong at the same level. It was either too high for the basses or too low for the tenors – so they adopted the practise of singing the plainsong in parallel fifths and fourths, or fourths and octaves. A form of consecutives that seemed extremely funny to us till it was revived in our own times as a new and original discovery. This daring innovation was called Organum or Diaphony. It began to grow towards Counterpoint when singers began to put in extra ornamented notes between one fifth and another. It became a reorganized device, which was probably first attempted by the singers, and then imitated by composers. But then we come to another very difficult obstacle which they had to get over.

Guido d'Arezzo's Micrologus. Solmization. 1000-1050.

Franco of Cologne 12<sup>th</sup> century. Cantus Mensurabilis.

When the singer extemporized his ornamental passages between one essential note and another it was understood that the singers who had the other part, which was not ornamented, waited till he had done. They held onto a single note while the privileged singer, who was called the discanter, showed off his ingenuity and his invention. But when people began to write down such things it was absolutely necessary that they should find out some way of showing the relative lengths of notes. Something which served the same purpose as our minims and crotchets and quavers – otherwise the singers could not be kept together with certainty even for as much as three notes in a row – for you must remember they had no bars, and did not find them necessary for several centuries. But in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries they contrived the scheme of length notes (sic) which enabled singers to know exactly how long they were to hold a note while somebody else was singing shorter notes. They found it fearfully difficult to devise, and the system they did devise is so fearfully tangled and complicated it causes us terrible difficulties to decipher. They also by degrees

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discovered a way to show on paper exactly how much higher or lower one note was to be to another. The way they worked this out was so inevitable that it is positively comical. But I don't want to distract you with details at present. I only want to get you now to feel the way in which Music progressed from small beginnings to the elaborate complexity of modern times. One has to dwell rather long on the early stages because there were such a lot of things that had to be found out before they could make any headway at all. But when at last they had settled a scheme by which one could identify how many minims went to a semibreve, and what intervals a man was to try to sing, when he saw certain signs and strange marks on parchment composers began to apply themselves to new inventions. Then began the toilsome climb which has continued ever since till our own times. They had necessarily to begin with two parts – and having

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accepted the principle of having one voice holding on while another sang a lot of notes they made two discoveries. One was an elementary form of pedal – and the other was that there were ~~lots of~~ other intervals besides fifths and fourths which were quite agreeable to hear; and might be admitted as music without scandal. They had doubts for some time whether thirds were to be regarded as discords or concords. Major sixths they were sure were highly discordant – but all the same they and indeed all notes of the scales were admirable as inessential notes. And the results are often very strange to our ears, for they seem to have treated such discords as they used - as inessential notes – quite differently from our ways. The truth is that they emphasized to degree which is not easy to realize that the voices were concerned with singing combined melodies. The notes of one of the melodies might be long and the notes of the other short, but the mind was projected into thinking of them as melodies. It is extremely difficult to realize that they had no idea of harmony whatever. They had next to no feeling for it. But they merely bound themselves to have only certain consonances at certain

The principle heroes of the early struggles were Parisian Composers. The most celebrated was Perotin, Perotinus Maximus he was called. He was discanter of Notre Dame. Another was Leonin, and another Sabillon. This was somewhere about the reign of Philip Augustus when Paris was called the Athens of Europe and had a University with an enormous number of students who flocked thither from all parts of the known world. 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

We also had an important Musician of the name of Walter Odington in England – and this shows we were ~~making~~ giving Music attention – which is very much justified by our producing the greatest Composer in Europe ~~at the~~ in the early half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This was John Dunstable 1390-1453.

essential points. They might have octaves casually in a row or fifths in a row or fourths in a row – because they happened to be convenient. Of thirds they were a little cautious – and they were bound to end in a unison. It is quite pathetic to watch the difficulties they had to get even two parts to go decently together. And it was a long while before they dared to attempt three – as for four it was a sort of revelation of human mutual power which seemed to them almost superhuman. At first they could only achieve it by making one part hold on for an immense while, while the others moved cautiously about. You may sometimes find one voice holding on for a time equivalent to twenty or thirty bars (or much more) – and if he got blown(?) he was allowed to leave off in the middle of a syllable and go on again with the same syllable. Sometimes in the written music there are several rests in the same syllable, and the only thing that saves it from being irresistibly ludicrous is that as far as we can make out

(Philip Augustus died 1223.)

they did not begin this syllable again but went on to the vowel. (Pater noster e.g.) From the point of view of combining melodies they did make decisive attempts at one time to cut the Gordian knot by actually singing several known tunes simultaneously. Fortunately for us these have actually been recorded; and we thereby have examples of one of the most curious forms of Art ever attempted. But more than that we have also, for almost the first time, recorded examples of lots of folksongs either with a plainsong or a reiteration of a short formula in longish notes with either a familiar word from the Church Service or nonsense syllables. These strange products of ingenuity were called 'Motets'; and they are sometimes extremely funny – But at the same time it is often surprising how well the tunes are got to go together. Such a form of Art

Motets in the Montpellier MS.

Crecy 1346. Poitiers 1356.

Wycliff d. 1384.

John Dunstable. Henry IV's reign.

Barons Wars.

Netherlands come on the scene.

Dufay of Cambrai 1400 -~~1453~~ 1474.

Josquin des Pres latter part of 15<sup>th</sup> cent.

admitted of no development, and in course of time it ceased to be cultivated except at merry gatherings at Universities and Public Schools, where they are known as Dutch Choruses. We need not follow the development of artistic counterpoint now in detail. They toiled along, slowly obtaining more Musical results; and their works begin to assume qualities in which we can take pleasure and interest in the course of the ~~fourteenth~~ ~~fifteenth~~ fifteenth century. This is undoubtedly one of the great salient points of the story and we find some gratification in its being associated with the name of John Dunstable an Englishman. Of his pre-eminence as a composer at that time we need have no doubt; though most of his compositions are almost unperformable – some of them carry the devices of concurrent ornamental melodies to a pitch which beats us. Yet we can see they imply a great Musical personality. These works as it were look backwards to the methods of the previous time – and there are just a few which, though weirdly crude, do anticipate a new sense of counterpoint. They stand at the parting of the ways

The change was also from rhythmic Music to unrhythmic Music.

Between the period of Organum and that of Counterpoint Musicians addressed themselves very urgently to questions of rhythm.

Choral CP obliterates the sense of rhythm.

Josquin of Conde in Hainault.  
In Pope's choir from 1471 to 1484.  
Died at Lille in 1521.

Italian preeminence began at end of 16<sup>th</sup> century.



from the conditions of the Mediaeval struggles to the artistic mastery which was coming, and showed itself in such complete and mature guise in little more than a century after Dunstable. Unfortunately Music was utterly blocked in this country, and the lead passed over the waters to the Netherlands; and was the prerogative of Netherlanders for more than a century – from Dufay (1400- 1474) through Josquin des Pres and Obrecht, and Adrian Willaert (Madrigals 1480-1562) to some their finest greatest representative Orlando Lasso (1520 -1594) who rivalled Palestrina as the first composer in his time; and set the crown on the fruitful labours of the Netherlanders and applied the methods that they had developed in works which are highly characteristic of this race and country. With him ended the period of Netherland pre-eminence, and from that time Italy came to the front ever more and more. ~~The great Italians~~ The Italians had up to the second half of the sixteenth century depended on the Netherlands for their musicians, and a very large number of them occupied the most important Musical positions in Italy. The Italians

Palestrina.

Marenzio.

learnt their art from them and at the end of the 16th century brought the art of purely unaccompanied Choral Music to its highest perfection. Palestrina's works ~~for use in the service of the Church~~ are looked upon rightly as the most perfect example of their kind – all the best of them were ~~devotional and~~ composed for uses in the services of the Roman Church; ~~and the best of them they~~ and make the most perfect devotional Music in existence. It cannot be said that any other composer achieved anything nearly as beautiful for its serenity, sincerity and fervour. Vittoria most nearly approaches him in the same line; and Luca Marenzio took the foremost position in the newly cultivated branch of the secular Madrigal. Unaccompanied Choral Music then had reached the highest perfection of which it seemed capable. And men's minds turned to cultivate new fields, as they felt the possibilities of such art was exhausted. It is a strange thing to look back upon. For the only Music men thought worthy of the name of Art was confined to such as could be produced by voices. Men had not begun to think of anything of the nature of form or organization. The Music had to be built upon a given melody

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such as you call a Canto Firmo. ~~They hardly used any discords~~ The only discords they used were prepared ones, and even of those things were sparing – and there were hardly any subjects which really stood out from the context; which was owing mainly to the fact that the old ~~Choral~~ Contrapuntal Music was quite unrhythmic. Composers attitude of mind towards independent vocal parts made them obscure the sense of rhythm. And a very quaint result followed as we shall see. At the end of the sixteenth century change was in the air. Composers were beginning to feel the call of secular Music. The secular spirit was becoming importunate – and the old placid beauty of devotional Music did not satisfy men's cravings. They were trying their hand at more characteristic expression. They tried to write dance songs for voices calling them balletti – and they were trying their hands at instrumental Music. By this time the mechanism of Organs was being sufficiently improved for them to be used as solo instruments. And they had viols (the flat backed dull sounding predecessors of Violins and cellos) and clavichords and harpsichords and lutes and trombones and trumpets, and some very clumsy reed instruments. But the irresistible continuity of the gradual development of art is shown in a very quaint way. Men's minds had been entirely

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engrossed in developing Choral Contrapuntal Music; they had not begun to think of the kind of artistic methods which were appropriate to instrumental art. They did not realize the necessity for rhythm in it nor the necessity of form and design. So when they wanted to write serious artistic movements for instruments in combinations they tried to write them on the same lines as they wrote Choral Music – without words – with the very dreary results. And even Music for harpsichords and lutes was also frequently written in the same style. But there were attempts at dance tunes – and the adventurous forerunners of Organ Music of a totally new kind made their appearance in the persons of Andrea Gabrieli 1519-1590 and his great nephew Giovanni Gabrieli 1557 -1612 and the father of modern Organ Music Claudio Merulo 1533-1604. All these three belonged to Venice, and in that romantic town in the romantic shadows of St Mark's they set the ball rolling in the modern direction. Away from strict counterpoint towards harmonic treatment and the characteristic effects of runs and arpeggios and kinds of phraseology which were quite alien from the tranquil devotional Music of choral voices.

Gregory 'the great' born abt. 540.  
At Constantinople 579.  
Made Pope 590. Died 604.

The second lecture is in one of the little white books.